

September 29, 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of the WWI battlefield death of Frank Luke JR. after whom Luke Air Force Base is named. Fittingly, this is a lightly edited reprint of an article I wrote several years ago...

Luke Air Force Base—the Best of the West Valley

Some thirteen years ago, I was a somewhat reluctant transplant from Illinois. My wife, an Arizona native, had just gone through a serious illness and we decided to move her back home to Arizona so she could be close to her family.

Going from the cornfields and forests of Illinois to the Sonoran desert of the Valley-of-the-Sun was, in many ways, a jarring experience. The visual contrast between lush verdancy and the pastels and creams of the desert landscape was intense. Early on, in my first summer, I learned about the dangers of steering wheels and heat conductivity.

But as we settled into our new home, I fell in love with the West Valley with all its many and varied attributes and amenities. Chief among them is Luke Air Force Base (AFB).

Luke AFB, as I quickly learned, is of vital importance not only to the region but also to the state and the nation. Luke AFB contributes in excess of \$2 billion annually to the Arizona economy and is one of the largest employers in the state.

Luke began as a 1440 acre land lease from the City of Phoenix to the Army Air Corps in 1941 and was first known as Litchfield Park Air Base. Later that same year, it was renamed Luke Field in honor of Frank Luke Jr. a WWI flying ace and the first aviator awarded the Medal of Honor. (The award was posthumous since Frank Luke Jr. was killed in action on September 29, 1918 at age 21 after his 200 hp SPAD XIII bi-plane was shot down near Murvaux, France).

The United State Air Force became a separate military service on September 18, 1947 and, after a five year deactivation between WWII and the Korean War, Luke Field was reactivated and officially named Luke Air Force Base.

Some 12,000 pilots were trained at Luke Field during WWII and over the years, in excess of 55,000 fighter pilots have been trained at Luke AFB. In modern times, the vast majority of Middle-Eastern-Theatre pilots have been trained at Luke AFB. With its desert location and close proximity to the Barry M. Goldwater Bombing Range, it is an ideal training facility for this country's current military missions.

In August of 2012, the Air Force announced the selection of Luke AFB as a pilot training center for the new Joint Strike Fighter or F-35 program. The F-35 is an exportable '5th generation' fighter and is the product of a partnership of nine countries: the United States, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

This announcement was the culmination of an arduous, years long, unprecedented cooperative marketing effort which saw every municipality in the West Valley along with Maricopa County,

the State of Arizona and many of the region's major employers come together, as partners, to petition and lobby the Air Force to place this critical mission at Luke AFB.

Local, county and state leaders have worked hard, for decades, defending Luke from the BRAC process (Base Closure and Realignment Commission) of the 1990s and developmental encroachment of the early 2000s. This unprecedented support and co-operation has assured that Luke AFB will be able to fulfill its daily flight missions and remain an integral part of the West Valley well into the future.

The West Valley Partnership still meets on a regular basis and continues to look after and stay involved with Luke AFB and Luke works hard to involve itself in the communities surrounding it.

As I travel throughout the West Valley, fighter jets are a ubiquitous presence in our desert skies. I always look up and follow their trajectories as they streak overhead and I think about the importance of Luke AFB, on so many levels, and what it means to the security of the West Valley, Arizona and the United States as fighter pilots--Air Force men and women-- train daily to assure fulfillment of the Air Force mission to "fly, fight and win".

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Correction

In last month's article, **Don't Be Fooled**, I made a serious typographical error:

"There is a ballot initiative campaign being waged called 'Clean Energy for a Healthy Arizona'. It would require that Arizona's utility companies obtain 50% of their energy from renewable sources by 2050—a destructively unrealistic mandate. It is being funded, primarily, by California billionaire Tom Steyer."

The proposed ballot initiative would actually require Arizona's utility companies to obtain 50% of their energy from renewable sources **by 2030 not 2050** as stated, making the initiative that much more unrealistic and destructive. I apologize for the error...